



Future Babble: Why Pundits Are Hedgehogs and Foxes Know Best

By Daniel Gardner

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Future Babble: Why Pundits Are Hedgehogs and Foxes Know Best By Daniel Gardner

An award-winning journalist uses landmark research to debunk the whole expert prediction industry, and explores the psychology of our obsession with future history.

In 2008, experts predicted gas would hit \$20 a gallon; it peaked at \$4.10. In 1967, they said the USSR would be the world's fastest-growing economy by 2000; by 2000, the USSR no longer existed. In 1908, it was pronounced that there would be no more wars in Europe; we all know how that turned out. Face it, experts are about as accurate as dart-throwing monkeys. And yet every day we ask them to predict the future- everything from the weather to the likelihood of a terrorist attack. *Future Babble* is the first book to examine this phenomenon, showing why our brains yearn for certainty about the future, why we are attracted to those who predict it confidently, and why it's so easy for us to ignore the trail of outrageously wrong forecasts.

In this fast-paced, example-packed, sometimes darkly hilarious book, journalist Dan Gardner shows how seminal research by UC Berkeley professor Philip Tetlock proved that the more famous a pundit is, the more likely he is to be right about as often as a stopped watch. Gardner also draws on current research in cognitive psychology, political science, and behavioral economics to discover something quite reassuring: The future is always uncertain, but the end is not always near.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Gardner, a columnist and senior writer for the Ottawa Citizen (The Science of Fear), examines the misguided trust people place in media forecasters and "legions of experts" who make meaningless predictions about the future. He reviews the findings of psychologist Philip Tetlock, who had 284 experts from a range of disciplines make 27,450 predictions on political and economic trends, concluding they produced about the same results as random guesses. Biologist Paul Erhlich is one of his main targets. In 1968's The Population Bomb, Ehrlich predicted mass famines. In fact, Gardner points to America's "epidemic of obesity" and growing calorie intake worldwide. Gardner also probes economic and environmental worries, and warnings of wars, climate change, the Y2K hysteria, and the weather, which he says can be forecast with accuracy only at most two days out. Successful predictions are celebrated, Gardner says, while the wrong ones are forgotten. Yet he might have done well to remember more of those accurate predictions, and to focus more on Tetlock's conclusions about those experts who show greater accuracy and on how the public might recognize them. Instead, he writes off accurate predictions as "likely... a coincidence." (Mar. 17)

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From [Booklist](#)

We humans have an apparently insatiable appetite for predictions about the future, but the "experts" to whom we turn for predictions often do an exceedingly poor job of forecasting. Why? Drawing upon the research of psychologist Philip Tetlock, whose 20-year study of expert predictions suggested that experts were about as accurate in predicting the future as dart-throwing monkeys, as well as insights from cognitive science, Ottawa journalist Gardner argues that the problem is not lousy experts so much as our deeply rooted human need for certainty. Wanting definite, unqualified answers about the future, we encourage experts to make bold, unconditional predictions that often turn out to be wrong; but we are quick to forgive and forget. (Recall, for example, the many predictioneers who forecast clear economic sailing through the fall of 2008). Like his earlier work, in which Gardner also explored the challenge of dealing with uncertainty (The Science of Fear, 2009), this selection urges (and demonstrates) a calm, rational perspective; a healthy skepticism; and an effort to make peace with life's uncertainties. --Brendan Driscoll

Review

"Future Babble is genuinely arresting...required reading for journalists, politicians, academics and anyone who listens to them." Steven Pinker "In this brilliant and engaging book, Dan Gardner shows us how tough forecasting really is, and how easy it is to be convinced otherwise by a confident expert with a good story. This is must reading for anyone who cares about the future." Paul Slovic, Professor of Psychology, University of Oregon "Well-researched, well-reasoned, and engagingly written." John Mueller, author of Overblown and Political Scientist, Ohio State University "A rare mix of superb scholarship and zesty prose." Philip Tetlock, author of Expert Political Judgement and Mitchell Professor of Organizational Behavior, Hass School of Business, University of California "It is a tour de force, absolutely outstanding" Matt Ridley

Users Review

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Jan Doyle:

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Eduardo Ford:

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Michael Santiago:

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